

Statement of St. Andrew's United Church
concerning reconciliation and Indigenous fishing rights in Atlantic Canada

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN NOVA SCOTIA we express profound concern and a call for justice and reconciliation in our society's response to the exercise of Indigenous fishing rights. In recent days the violence and racism in response to a legitimate, lawful and dignified pursuit of a moderate livelihood fishery by *Mi'kmaq* people has shocked our consciences.

We are troubled as much by the history which has brought matters to this point as we are by the behaviour and criminal acts of those who would deny a fundamental treaty right to Canada's first peoples. We recognize that our society and government failed to conceive an equitable scheme for governance for all involved – Indigenous peoples, commercial inshore fishers and those responsible for an offshore fishery – that would give meaningful effect to our collective constitutional and historic obligations.

How we arrived at such a moment after the 1999 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Marshall* case and its aftermath at Burnt Church in 2000-01 demands critical self-reflection. We are fortunate to have the wisdom of others, including the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* and the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada*. No better words than these from the Commission serve as guidance for renewed appreciation of the necessary work: "Treaty relationships [are] based on principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for maintaining those relationships into the future".¹

¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action* (Winnipeg, 2015), Recommendation 45(iii), at page 5. Available online: < http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf>

The St. Andrew's community recognizes that the *good work* of justice and reconciliation begins with education and awareness. We recommit to meaningful comprehension and reckoning with our perceptions and biases that impair our capacity to listen to Indigenous voices. We commit anew to the continuing work of education; of transformation through deep understanding. We freshly commit to listen with respect to the concerns, fears, dreams and vision our country is so fortunate to have from its Indigenous peoples.

We support those seeking to bring peace and understanding to the better implementation of Indigenous fishing rights in our region, mindful of other natural resource-related issues for Canada's first peoples. We call to account government leaders past and present over the delay in meaningful implementation of the *Marshall* decision. We equally support steps in recent days toward dialogue among all with an interest in the fishery, including the federal government's appointment of a Special Representative. The time has arrived when the promise of implementing the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* has become clear.² The *Declaration* is not an entire answer to reconciliation or a narrow achieving of justice in matters of natural resources. But its adoption is an important milestone made important by recent events.

We give final voice to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

*At the community level, where contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is often minimal or marred by distrust and racism, establishing respectful relationships involves learning to be good neighbours. This means being respect-ful — listening to, and learning from, each other; building understanding; and taking concrete action to improve relationships.*³

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² *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, A/RES/61/295 (13 September 2007), available at: <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>>

³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg, 2015) page 307. Available at: <http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf>